

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
THE MEDICAL SCHOOL  
MADISON 6

1-1-57  
Van Potter ↓

MCARDLE MEMORIAL LABORATORY  
FOR CANCER RESEARCH

February 1, 1957

Dr. E. B. Fred, President  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison 6, Wisconsin

Dear Doctor Fred:

I am writing at this time to urge that every effort be made to encourage Dr. Joshua Lederberg to remain at this University. As you know, Dr. Lederberg at present has the title of Professor of Genetics at the age of 31 and has been given every encouragement for advancement at this University. I believe he has no complaints whatsoever about his present situation. However I believe that his interests have always been in the direction of medicine and I know that he originally planned to obtain a medical degree. For some time he has been thinking in terms of the desirability of a department of Medical Genetics in the Medical School. I believe he played an important part in the selection and appointment of Dr. Newton E. Morton with a joint title of Assistant Professor of Anatomy and Genetics, which might be looked upon as a step in the direction of a department of Medical Genetics.

Recently he has received offers from Stanford and from the University of California and from one or two other places. I believe that he is seriously interested in the Berkeley offer and that we must ask what might be done to keep him at Wisconsin. My interests in this are two-fold: since I intend to remain at Wisconsin I wish to urge that outstanding people be developed or brought in and that the inducements be kept adequate to keep them here in order to maintain the strength of this institution; secondly, I derive immediate benefit from the intellectual stimulation resulting from contact with Dr. Lederberg and his wife and his students. Many of his students take my course in Nucleic Acid Metabolism and both my students and I benefit from this contact.

I do not believe that salary alone will be a deciding factor nor will any form of advancement within the present department of genetics suffice to keep Dr. Lederberg at this University. I believe that what will be needed is the creation of a Department of Medical Genetics (not Human Genetics) in the Medical School, with Dr. Lederberg as its chairman, and with Dr. Morton and one additional staff member to constitute the department. I think Dr. Lederberg would like to maintain his present cordial relations with the Genetics Department in the School of Agriculture and to formalize this by some kind of a joint appointment if this can be worked out. This letter is addressed to you rather than to the Dean of the Medical School because it is a University problem rather than a problem of the Medical School alone.

Dr. E. B. Fred

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I might add that Dr. Rusch has been examining possible candidates for a staff position in The McArdle Laboratory to embrace the border line area that includes virology, immunogenetics, differentiation and cytogenetics, and that the appointment of a man in this area would also be an inducement for Dr. Lederberg to remain at Wisconsin. Indeed, he is in an excellent position to suggest possible candidates for this appointment and has expressed an interest in at least one possibility to me.

It is clear that knowledge in the fields of microbiological genetics and biochemistry is developing with explosive rapidity and that there will be tremendous repercussions of these advances carrying over into the medical and agricultural fields. While the agricultural geneticists at Wisconsin are well represented, there is really no one in the medical school who is specifically covering the sector of Medical genetics. It is a credit to Dr. Lederberg that he sees the problem in terms of the next 10 to 20 years, and the creation of a department of Medical Genetics would recognize the developments that are in the foreseeable future. Since Dr. Lederberg's wishes seem to coincide with Wisconsin's need, I am sure that a mutually satisfactory solution can be worked out. I believe that most medical schools that have a genetics department are called departments of human genetics and are concerned with statistical studies. I think that this might be the first department called Medical Genetics and that it might be the first to be organized by a microbiological geneticist. I wish to be on record as favoring such a move, with Dr. Lederberg if possible because I believe his background will enable him to envision developments in Medical genetics that will not be possible in departments built along the classical lines of human genetics.

Respectfully yours,

*Van R Potter*

Van R. Potter  
Professor of Oncology

VRP:hi

cc: Dr. C. A. Elvehjem  
Dr. John Z. Bowers  
Dr. H. P. Rusch  
Dr. Joshua Lederberg

Note:

E B F discussed this matter today with Dean Elvehjem and also with Dr. Irwin (over the telephone).

He later called Dr. Potter & reported on his discussions with Lederberg, Elvehjem & Irwin - & assured Dr. Potter of his desire to do everything possible to keep Lederberg at Wisconsin, suggesting it might be desirable (for the present, at least) for Lederberg to try to "Keep one foot in each place" (Genetics & Medicine). 114

Dr. Potter promised to do everything he can to help work out plans which will keep Lederberg at Wisconsin. eo

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